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THE DEVELOPMENT AND PRODUCTION OF THE *COMODO KEEPER*

By

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of the Requirements for
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THE DEVELOPMENT AND PRODUCTION OF THE *COMODO KEEPER*

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Summary

As a musician of large ensembles, I have seen the destruction the harsh sound of a metal mouthpiece cap falling onto the cold, hard floor can do to both the concentration of the members of the rehearsal as well as the mood of the conductor. Many saxophonists and clarinetists keep their mouthpiece caps on the edge of their flimsy music stands because during periods of rest, it is best to preserve the reed with the cap. However, with virtually every rehearsal I partake in, shuffling one's music and grabbing pencils off the stand results in an accident. Witnessing this interruption during a performance is sadly a common occurrence. Many male performers opt to shove their mouthpiece caps in the pocket of their pants during a performance, so it doesn't run the risk of falling off the stand. But what about female performers who wear pocket-less dresses? The unnecessary rustle of stands and pocket less pants (or dresses) are only two of the many aggravating issues to come along with not having proper storage for one's mouthpiece cap.

A product needed to be developed in order to avoid this frustrating and frequent problem. In a Facebook survey I conducted last year, twenty-four out of twenty-four serious high school and college-aged single reed players agreed.

Introducing the Comodo Keeper- a simple and versatile way to store one's clarinet or saxophone mouthpiece cap during practice, rehearsal, and performance- it fits any cap from an Eb clarinet to a bass saxophone.

For my senior project, I chose to highlight my minor I have studied at USC, music entrepreneurship. As a music performance major, I know that in order to have a sustainable music career, I will have to balance multiple streams of income. I worked

closely with my business partner, Jessica Quattrini, to develop a business model, brand, and prototype of the Keeper. Once these aspects were completed, we started focusing on the marketing aspect of the product. Our projected customers are saxophonists and clarinetists of all ages who are serious about their hobby/profession. When advertising our product, we made it gender neutral, age neutral, and catered equally to saxophonists and clarinetists alike- unlike our one competitor, the Klaspit, which is geared specifically towards saxophonists.

Getting the Keeper out to the market and making its mark is, and will be, the most difficult part of the process. We planned to first sell it at local music retailers to test out the waters. These retailers include Pecknel of Columbia, and Musical Innovations of Greenville. As music students, we will also give free trial periods to our fellow saxophonist and clarinetist peers, as well as the clarinet and saxophone professor at the University. Being a music student at USC for the past four years, I have also gained connections with many local middle and high schools where we can market our product. Their enthusiasm will create free advertising, which will attract many other serious musicians to our product.

The documents below represent the work Jessica and I have put into this product over the past year. With research, dedication, and collaboration, the Keeper will have a great chance of being successful.

Introduction

The concert hall was particularly packed last night; every seat was taken. The soft excited murmurs of attendees filled the large open space, creating a cloud of cluttered whispers above their heads. The hall was built to resonate sound, and resonate it did. Every sound echoed and every voice carried. Not a single word went unheard, unless lost amongst the chattering. As the musicians took the stage in preparation for their performance, the whispers calmed and for a moment there was silence. Suddenly the band members began to warm-up and their arpeggios, and scalar runs cut through the silence with a dissonant roar. Then when the lights dimmed and the musicians quieted, silence ensued once more.

All eyes were on the stage. When the principal clarinetist stood, all eyes were on her. She raised, lifted her clarinet, took off her mouthpiece cap, and placed it on her music stand. The clarinetist stood on top of the conductor's podium, and nodded towards the oboe to cue the tuning note for the ensemble. After the band had finished tuning, the clarinetist sat down. Shortly after, the conductor took the stage. The audience clapped and the band stood in recognition. He bowed, seated the band, took the podium, raised his hands, and once again there was silence. All that was felt was the anticipatory excitement of the audience. Just as the conductor's hands fell, a loud and unexpected clatter burst into the air. The principal clarinetist's mouthpiece cap had fallen from her stand and hit the floor with a monstrous *clank*.

The Need

Over the course of their careers, professional woodwind musicians accumulate many accessories for their instruments. These accessories include mouthpiece caps, swabs, reeds, instrument stands, ligatures, and more. However, a solution to the mouthpiece cap problem has yet to be developed. This problem has always been a subject of interest because of its distracting nature. A mouthpiece cap is usually made of metal or a hard plastic and a stage usually contains a hard wood floor. When the two materials collide, they create a high-pitched sound that is extremely distracting. Many saxophonists and clarinetists keep their mouthpiece caps at a reachable distance, which usually means on the edge of their music stands. This is because during periods of rest, it is best to preserve the reed with the cap. Though a music stand seems like a perfectly good place to store the mouthpiece cap, due to extraneous factors, the cap often finds its way to the ground. The main goal of all musicians is to perform to their utmost ability. For single reed players, this goal can be more attainable if the mouthpiece cap stays on as long as possible. The mouthpiece cap acts as a humidity and temperature control mechanism. Many pieces of music require precise and accurate entrances after upwards of tens to hundreds of measures of rest; there is no room for error- especially for reed players whose faith lies with the playability, consistency and quality of their reeds. To meet this need, a product needed to be developed.

Research

To further explore the need for our product, we researched our competitors and our target audience. Our biggest and only competitor we could find is the Klaspit. The Klaspit is a mouthpiece cap accessory that claims to meet the needs expressed earlier. The Klaspit is a small gadget made of metal and a dense, slightly malleable, plastic. The design is very economical and offers little beyond utility. The only visually thoughtful design element is a staff and treble clef. Another issue with the Klaspit is in its versatility. This accessory was designed exclusively for alto, tenor, and baritone saxophonists, and functions by clasping only onto the saxophonist's neck strap. A neck strap is a necessity for all saxophone players, but is seldom used by clarinetists. Thus, the Klaspit is leaving



out a crucial part of the target market. The Klaspit was brought to the market in 2008. Yet, since its inception, has made little progress. It is sold predominantly on E-bay for approximately \$6 and has made no obvious efforts to move beyond that site. We were unable to find the product on any website of a large music accessories retailer.

Although the Facebook survey I created last year gave us 100% positive feedback, we wanted a larger sample. To research our target audience, we developed surveys featuring more than just the question, “Would you, as a clarinet or sax player, benefit from a mouth piece cap holder that attaches directly to the stand?” We planned to distribute these new surveys to the clarinet and saxophone masterclasses here at USC. The chart below features the results of our first survey. (Not all students were present in masterclass to take the survey.)

Comodo Keeper Survey- for all single reed players- Version 1

- 1. Does finding a place to put your mouthpiece cap while practicing/rehearsing/performing frustrate you?**

YES___7___ NO___15___

- 2. Where do you usually put your mouthpiece cap during these times?
(check 1)**

___3___music stand

___3___pocket of pants

_____pocket of shirt

___8___in case

___8___other- explain: floor_____

- 3. Does your answer to question #2 pose a risk to interrupting your practice/rehearsal/performance due to (check all that apply):**

___8___dropping on the floor

___3___discomfort on your body

___7___ I have to put my cap in my case, therefore my reed dries out faster and doesn't sound as good

_____other- explain:_____

- 4. Would you buy a device that secures your mouthpiece cap (of any size) to the neck of a stand without risk of dropping?**

YES___2___ NO___20___

- 5.What is the maximum price you (or your parents) would be willing to pay for the device?**

___5___\$7-8.99

_____ \$9-10.99

___1___\$11-12.99

_____ \$13+

Unfortunately, we did not get the survey results we were anticipating. The percentage of people who would find the Keeper useful in the Facebook survey was significantly higher than in the USC masterclass surveys. Jessica and I identified a major factor that could have caused this percentage drop.

The survey-takers did not know exactly what kind of product this is. They did not have a visual or an example of the Keeper. For our next survey (which will be taking place after this project paper is due, so I will be presenting our findings at my project defense) Jessica and I will be including a short elevator pitch about the Keeper to the masterclasses. This pitch will include Jessica, who plays clarinet, using our product in a simulated practice session. We will let the audience view how the Keeper works, and then give our short speech about the need. Then, we will distribute updated surveys (shown on next page). In these new surveys, we are not including a question of price. At this point, we are more interested in the demand. Instead of the pricing question, we are adding in a question about accessories. We want to know if the customers would be more interested in the product if it came with an attachable tray, personalized logos, etc.

Comodo Keeper Survey- for all single reed players-version 2

1. Where do you usually put your mouthpiece cap during rehearsal/performance? (check 1)

___4___music stand

___6___pocket of pants

___3___pocket of shirt

___2___in case

___3___other (Explain)_____floor, pocket of jacket_____

2. Do any of the following happen because of where you place your mouthpiece cap?

___8___dropping on the floor

___3___discomfort on your body

___4___ I have to put my cap in my case, therefore my reed dries out faster and doesn't sound as good

_____other (Explain)_____

3. Do you find yourself wanting a practical solution for these problems?

YES___8___ NO___10___

4. Would you buy a device that secures your mouthpiece cap (of any size) to the neck of a stand without risk of dropping?

YES___10___ NO___8___

5. Would you be more interested if the device came with: (check all that apply)

___8___an attachable tray to put your swab, reeds, etc on

_____an option to personalize it with logos, colors, etc

___12___I would be interested in just the device, in black

Design



While discussing the brand of the Keeper, Jessica and I decided to design a bigger brand where the Keeper would just be one of many potential products. We choose to call our brand Comodo-meaning ‘convenient’ in Italian- because we want our customers to experience the ease our company gives them when it comes to music based issues. Whereas the Klaspit is geared exclusively to saxophonists, the Keeper is marketed to both saxophonists and clarinetists, greatly expanding the target market. Our product features a soft, velvet covered silicone piece that connects to the music stand while rehearsing or performing.

Our projected customer is a saxophonist or clarinetist of any age who is serious about their hobby/profession. When advertising our product, we will make it gender

neutral, and age neutral. The Keeper is portable, lightweight and easy to use. This musical accessory is approximately three inches, by one and a half inches, and about three and a half inches tall. The Keeper is manufactured out of the following materials: silicone, deluxe velvet, and will include an adjustable Velcro strap. If we continue with the Comodo brand, we will also be offering a response product to the Klaspit. The Cap Clip would be an accessory for the clarinetist or saxophonist who does not require a stand for performance. It would be a very inexpensive response to the Klaspit, and for any musician in need of a mouthpiece cap holder. The Cap Clip would be offered after the pending success of Keeper.

The development of the actual design of the Keeper lays in Jessica's expertise. She was able to craft the Keeper post by pouring a silicone mold, and forming it to our projected size. In my project defense, I will have the mold on display.

Financial Plan

The following income statement, balance sheet, and cash flow chart represent financially what we are expecting after our first year on the market. At that point in time we will have designed a website to sell our product exclusively. For the first year, we will not sell our product to music stores, because we need a year on our own to demonstrate the demand of the product. Therefore, these numbers are based on Jessica and me producing and distributing in-house. We were fortunate to receive a gift of \$250 to buy the supplies for our initial prototype experimentation from Tayloe Harding, Dean of the School of Music. Our amount of sales is derived from estimations based on the outcome of our survey, the number of perspective customers in the surrounding areas, number of clarinetist and saxophonist who shop at local music stores, and the amount of Klaspits sold online. I will own 51% of the company, and Jessica will own 49% of the company.

Materials

- Black silicone (Per unit: \$0.15/ Up front: \$1,500)
- Black Velvet (1 5”X5” swatch= 1 Dollar \$7.95/yard)
- Black Adjustable strap (\$0.15/strap)

This information was procured via www.hurculesstands.com and Peliton Plasticis Mold Company.

- Cost per 1 unit of the Keeper: \$1.30
- Number of Initial Products Ordered: 300
- Number of Units projected to sell in first year: 300

Based on our research on the Klaspit brand, we decided to price the Keeper at \$9.95. This allows us to be cheaper, but still make a profit. Our profit would be \$8.65 per unit, making our margins approximately 86.9% if we produce and distribute in-house.

Income Statement, 2014

Fiscal Year 1/1/2014 – 12/31/2014

	\$ Cash	%
Sales	2,985	
Other income	250	
Cost of Goods Sold	390	13.7%
Gross Profit	2,845	86.3%
Total Profit	2,845	
Operating Expenses		
Supplies	320	40.4%
Tech Support	200	25.2%
Postage and shipping	100	12.5%
Packaging	100	12.5%
Cost of mold	75	9.4%
Total Expenses	795	
Net Income	2,050	

Keeper
Cash Flow Projection
Year: 2014

Cash Receipts	Total: 12 month period
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Income from sales	
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Cash Sales	\$2,985
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Other cash receipts	\$250
---------------------	-------

Total Cash From Sales	\$3,235
------------------------------	----------------

Cash Disbursements	
---------------------------	--

Expenses	
-----------------	--

Cost of Goods Sold	\$390
--------------------	-------

Operating Expenses	\$795
--------------------	-------

Total Disbursements	\$1,185
----------------------------	----------------

Net cash Flow	\$2,050
----------------------	----------------

Ending Balance	\$2,050
----------------	---------

The Keeper
Balance Sheet
As of December 31, 2014

ASSETS

Current Assets

Checking/Savings

<i>USAA</i>	500.00
-------------	--------

<i>Wells Fargo</i>	<u>500.00</u>
--------------------	---------------

Total Checking/Savings	1,000.00
------------------------	-----------------

Accounts Receivable

<i>Accounts Receivable</i>	<u>2,050.00</u>
----------------------------	-----------------

Total Accounts Receivable	2,050.00
---------------------------	-----------------

Other Current Assets

<i>Cap Mold Sponsor Donation</i>	<u>250.00</u>
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Total Other Current Assets	250.00
----------------------------	---------------

Total Current Assets	3,300.00
----------------------	-----------------

Total Fixed Assets	0.00
--------------------	-------------

TOTAL ASSETS	3,300.00
---------------------	-----------------

LIABILITIES AND EQUITY

Liabilities

Current Liabilities

Accounts Payable

<i>Accounts Payable</i>	<u>0.00</u>
-------------------------	-------------

Total Accounts Payable	0.00
------------------------	-------------

Other Current Liabilities

<i>Basic Mechanical Patent</i>	<u>0.00</u>
--------------------------------	-------------

Total Other Current Liabilities	0.00
---------------------------------	-------------

Total Current Liabilities	0.00
---------------------------	-------------

Total Liabilities	0.00
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Equity

<i>Owner's Equity</i>	<u>- 4351.2</u>
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Total Equity	-4351.2
--------------	----------------

TOTAL LIABILITIES & EQUITY	-4351.2
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Unforeseen Obstacles and Self Reflection

I learned a great amount through the process of developing the Keeper. Of course, no great project is complete without coming across a few barriers. First, it's necessary to have a timeline, but it is nearly impossible to follow it perfectly. We started out with very ambitious goals, but we soon realized that because we both had personal aspirations beyond the Keeper (I with oboe performance, and Jessica with graphic design), it was tough to devote enough time to get all of our Keeper objectives completed. Therefore, we decided to simplify our end goal about 6 weeks out- to create a beautiful and functional final prototype, and to test its value throughout the USC School of Music.

Our second obstacle was the difficulty in acquiring a large sample size for our surveys. From the beginning of our project, Jessica and I had planned to present our surveys to the saxophone and clarinet students of the 2014 USC Band Clinic in February. This would have given us a sample of about 100 dedicated single reed players. Unfortunately, because of bad weather conditions, the band clinic was cancelled. Jessica and I then had to think of another way we could obtain a large sample in a short amount of time. Our next option was to bring the surveys to the South Carolina All-State band in March. This would give us feedback from about 100 musicians as well. Regrettably, there were communication problems on both sides, and the surveys did not get distributed yet again. With limited time left in the semester, Jessica and I opted to present the surveys twice to the clarinet and saxophone masterclasses at USC.

Although we had these two setbacks, I was still able to gain much experience working with people, and learn more about business. Having a partner in this particular

venture was exceedingly helpful. Coming from a visual art and graphic design background, Jessica has an eye for the design that I didn't. She knew the materials needed to make the Keeper, and knew how to use computer design programs that I wasn't as familiar with. Also, she plays a single-reed instrument and has more first-hand experience of why the Keeper is a needed product. On the other hand, I played more of the analytical, researcher role in this project. While we do work well together, time management was an issue with us. Finding adequate time each week to meet with such different schedules was definitely a challenge. However, we learned to be considerate of each other's time and made it work.

Not only did I learn about people from working with Jessica, the miscommunication at the All-State Band Clinic was a great learning experience as well. I now know that even if you think what you say in an email is perfectly clear, it could be taken in a different way to someone else. That ambiguity cost us a large survey sample.

Through the past year and a half of this project, I have become more knowledgeable in the business aspect of this arts-based endeavor. The information I learned from my "Music and Money" class last spring allowed me to create the simulated income statement, balance sheet, and cash flow chart. Because of this, the financial aspect of this project is more realistic and apparent. I have also gotten to experience more of the marketing side of business. Through our target audience's feedback, I have learned how to cater to the needs of different potential customers. For example, some respond to comedy and some respond to cold hard facts.

Jessica and I also considered alternative options in the event that our financials do not work out for the future. In that case, we have formulated two ambitious options:

1. Try our chances at Shark Tank.

Shark Tank is a reality show that allows budding entrepreneurs to try to gain large investments or partnerships from big name investors such as Kevin O’Leary and Robert Herjavec. Many companies have become very successful this way, such as Miso Media, a music education software company based in Tampa, Florida, and Daisy Cakes, a gourmet cake company based in Spartanburg, South Carolina.

2. Sell the patent to a major company.

Instead of further development of the Comodo brand, we could sell the patent on our product to a major company. This way, we would receive royalties on every Keeper sold, but not have to delve into the financial strain of owning the company. We could look into companies such as Eble Music, Yamaha, Vandoren, and Rico- all companies that do not sell a product of this kind.

I am privileged to have gotten the opportunity to pursue this project and work with Jessica. The skills I have learned the past year and a half will stick with me for the rest of my life, and will be beneficial in any career path I choose.